

# Boss or Coach: What's the Difference?



Being a boss is a lot easier than being a coach. Bosses issue orders and enforce rules. They manage up, not down, and are more concerned with pleasing their own bosses than with helping to grow their own employees. Bosses typically have a fixed idea of how things should work and are not open to new ideas. Of course, "my way or the highway" does not develop committed employees. Those who succumb to the "authority trap" and try to tell and/or sell their ideas are not coaching; they are issuing orders or dictating.

Through discussion, the coach needs to exhibit flexibility and develop common goals that individuals can support and become excited about. Coaching requires a dialogue between the employee and the manager. The manager is working not only to attain acceptable performance levels, but also to help the employee grow and develop into a self-motivated achiever who will not only perform satisfactorily, but will want to be the best that he can be.

Coaching Self-Evaluation: <http://www.coachingandmentoring.com/Quiz/coaching.html>

The link above will take you to an online coaching quiz that will take about 5 minutes of your time to complete. When you finish, you will get your score, along with some helpful commentary on the various answer choices.

## **Here are some major differences between a boss and a coach:**

Bosses "tell"; coaches "teach". When it comes to improving performance, the boss tells the employee what is expected and how to get things done. The coach explains what is needed and why, and seeks the employee's input and ideas. Coaches show employees how to improve, seek their commitment, and encourage them to think for themselves.

1. Bosses inspire fear; coaches inspire trust. While fear may work in the short term, it does not inspire people to do their best in the long term. Fearful employees do what they need to do to survive, at least until they find a different job. Employees working for a good coach feel a sense of belonging, empowerment, and loyalty that makes them want to do their best work.
2. Bosses like to talk; coaches prefer to listen. Bosses are often out of touch with the day-to-day realities of the workplace. They are often inaccessible. They tend to spend a lot of time away from the work area: in

their offices, on the computer, in meetings. Coaches like to work where the action is. They want to be available for the employees and want to be part of the daily activity.

3. A boss needs to control. Whether it is the flow of paper, calls, e-mails, requests, or meetings, bosses want everything to go through them. Control is central to their being. A coach uses control as a tool selectively. Coaches allow a free flow of information without feeling the need to be traffic cops. They are not threatened by members of their team talking to their own coach or their coach's coach. By being honest and candid, they tell it like it is to their team and they expect the same in return.
4. A boss limits the training and development of the people under him or her. Bosses want only the most necessary technical or administration training for their people. Development is foreign to the boss. A coach ranks training and development as a top priority. Once a coach hires the best, he molds them to make them even better. Nothing is more gratifying to a coach than seeing their people advance to ever greater heights. They see it not as a threat but as the greatest compliment.

Would you rather work for a boss or a coach? Which do you think your employees would prefer? If you answered "coach," you are on the right track. Here are some helpful ideas of how to become a better manager by being a coach.

1. Listen more than you talk.
2. Before you jump in with all the answers, ask what your employees think.
3. Find out how people learn best. Some people need hands-on supervision; some people like to learn by watching first and then doing. Some people like to jump right in, make mistakes and then come to you when they have a question. Some people like to read about things and like to be referred to courses or manuals, etc. Some people won't learn by reading at all. Everyone learns differently, and as a manager, you are the one primarily responsible to see that people learn how to do their jobs with excellence. It's not the job of the training department, which is there to support you, not do all the teaching for you. Most managers mistakenly assume, without ever realizing it, that everyone learns the same way they themselves do. Very few managers ask people how they learn best, and so most people, when asked, don't know quite how to respond at first – they have to think about it. Go ahead and ask anyway, and make them think! Just by asking, you'll help them take more responsibility for their own learning while also getting a sense of how best to manage them and guide their growth in the job.
4. Praise in public, but correct in private. No one likes to be embarrassed in front of others. A manager who corrects an employee in front of others doesn't just make one enemy, he makes a whole roomful.
5. Don't try to be everyone's friend. Be friendly and pleasant, but keep your friendships out of the workplace.

6. Don't manage by email. Email is good for conveying basic information, clarifying simple inquiries, scheduling things, etc. But email is a blunt communication instrument, and not very good when it comes to anything that can involve or incite emotion. Stay away from it for matters of coaching or any conflict. It will only make things worse. Talk on the phone or, better yet, in person for anything of importance. Let them ask questions, see your eyes and hear your tone of voice whenever you can.
7. Spend more time with your best performers and less time with the poor performers. Your stronger people will have the best new ideas. New ideas can be built into successful new processes. Successful new processes can make the organization far better in accomplishing its mission, making everyone more productive. But if you're busy focusing on the "problem" people, you'll never notice ways to build with your best people. Even more, for many of your highest performers, your attention is a positive reinforcement, helping to promote the desirable behaviors you'd like to bring out of them and others. If you find yourself spending the majority of your time on "problem" people, you may need to recast them so their jobs better fit their talents, or even move them out of the organization, because people are often resistant to change. Don't make the mistake of thinking that good coaches spend most of their time trying to "help" problem people – that's backward, unless your job is social work. As a coach, you'll be most successful surrounding yourself with high performers and working to bring out their best.
8. Don't delay in correcting poor performance. The time to correct poor performance is when you first become aware of it. If quality is suffering, attendance is slipping, or quotas are not being met, the employee needs to know that this is an issue that needs to be corrected. First, point out the deficiency; then remind him of the acceptable standard. Ask what he plans to do to correct the problem (be specific; "I'll have to try to do better" isn't good enough); document your conversations; monitor the performance; and, if not improved, take further action. Poor performance isn't going to correct itself, and hoping that it will somehow improve on its own is just wishful thinking.